12 Howell C-4 (1965-1967) 1981 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

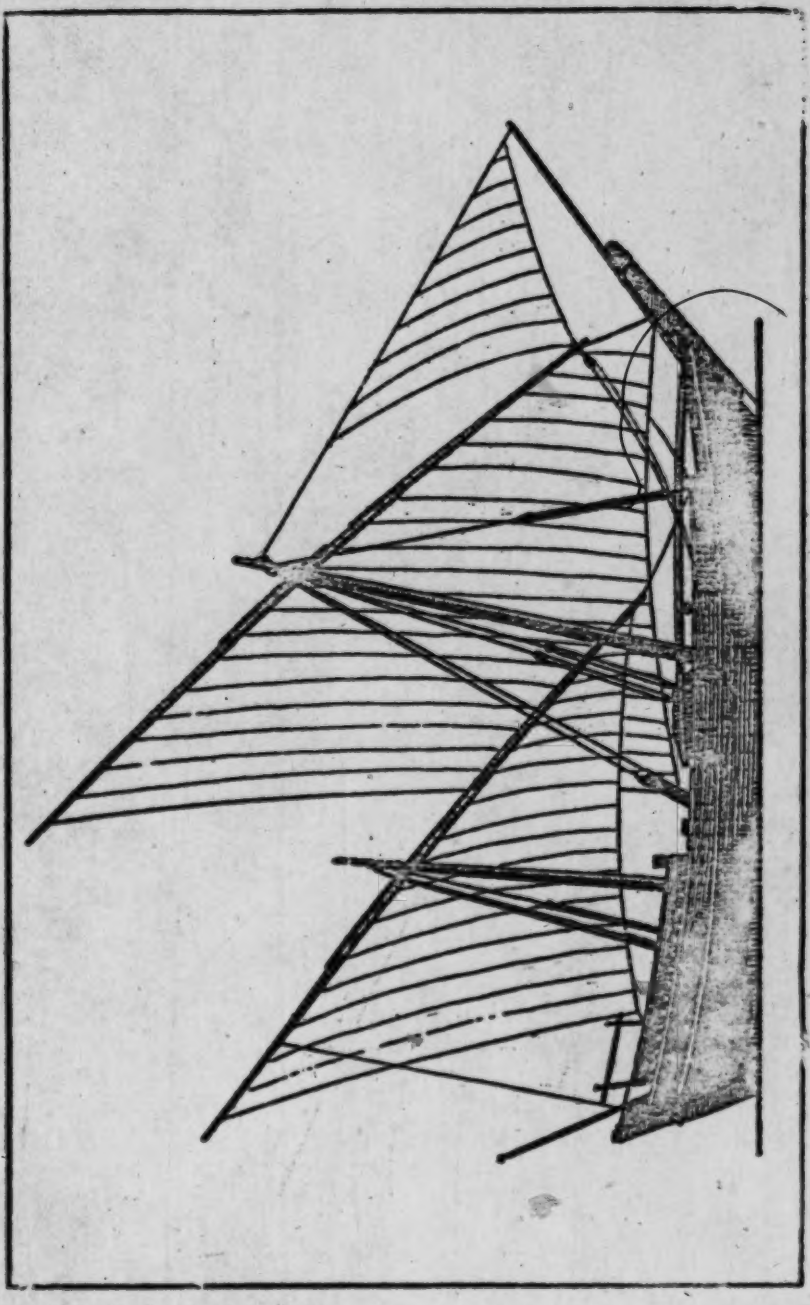
their graves, and justly, too, for diving probably hastened their end. The Government demands that account books be given each diver and that they be kept up properly, and sends inspectors to see that they are. Before the season begins at Bahrein the amount of cash advances is agreed upon and proclaimed. The divers have put up a terrific objection to this limitation, for it seemed to them that they were simply getting less money. They could not understand that their debt was being lowered—in fact they did not care, for hadn't they always been in debt?

There is a "diving court" which enforces the arbitrary laws of the industry, such as those dealing with engagement of labor, taxes, spurious pearls, etc. The court also disposes of any case of a *nakhoda* who cannot pay off his debts; the *nakhoda* may lose his boat and divers, but not his personal property.

There has never been any noticeable effort on the part of the ruling sheikhs to better the lot of their subjects: if they were unemployed for long periods in the winter they would be sure to work harder during the pearling season to pay off their winter's debts. As the local sheikhs levy a tax on every boat and get a cut of some sort on the proceeds, the pearlers in a sense work for them. The sheikh thus always looked on the lack of other employment with favor, for if a man were happily employed as a farmer, fisherman, or herder there would be little incentive to enter the pearling purgatory. Under normal conditions the divers have an eight months' loaf during which time they live off their *nakhoda;* this is to the liking of both the diver and the *nakhoda.*

However, many divers do find other work, as fishermen or mariners. The depression of the thirties hit the Persian Gulf pearl industry with great suddenness. Within a short period tens of thousands of pearlers in the Gulf found themselves without an occupation. The marine stock of Kuwait rose to the situation and gradually shifted to cargo hauling between Kuwait and Basra, Iran, India, South Arabia, and East Africa. Large ocean-going double-ended dhows have carried the fame of Kuwait seamanship throughout the Middle East, sailing to Africa on one monsoon and back on another. Kuwait oil operations have been drawing on this labor supply as well, so that nowadays the

2:K Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MI 1
MA
501



Arab Boom

[page 402]

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MI1

K MA 505 565

Negro origin, the descendants of slaves, though not now slaves themselves. Many others are of Iranian origin. Almost none are Bedouin, for the Arab Bedouin is not a seafaring man. In Kuwait, the callings open to the low-class Iranian are restricted to portering, pearling (either as diver or as tender), and sailing. Both Iranians and Negroes work splendidly, are loyal, competent, and well disciplined.

MA 565 426 465 278 428

As the *nakhoda* class is tied to the merchant by a structure of debt, so also are the sailors tied to the *nakhoda* class in the same way. All deep-sea sailing is paid for on a shares system, and there are no wages. Often the *nakhoda* of the deep-sea dhow has an interest in a pearling vessel (though not now to anything like the same extent as in former years), and the sailor may be bound to him through pearling debts, either his own or inherited. The more iniquitous practices in the pearling business structure have long been on the way out, largely because of the excellent example set at Bahrein, but the debt tradition stands and is almost impossible to eradicate.

MA 505 511 342 291 515 501 565

The sailors go to sea because they know no other life, and they make a wretched living by incredibly difficult methods. They have no possessions other than the clothes they stand in, and one or two spare gowns, a good headcloth, and a few sarongs. Their toothbrush is the twig of a tree; their ablutions are made five times daily at a mosque well, or in the sea; they know no shelter and rarely have a bed. The younger seamen, I have noticed, often have no home other than the *suq*, or native bazaar, where they coil down in their rough cloaks for a night's sleep on a bench in a cheap coffee shop, or in the sand. At sea, they stretch out on the deck, beneath the stars, for there is no such thing as accommodation for the seamen or anyone else in most dhows. The officers and the more important merchants live on a bench round the wheel, in the stern of the ship; the seamen lie down anywhere.

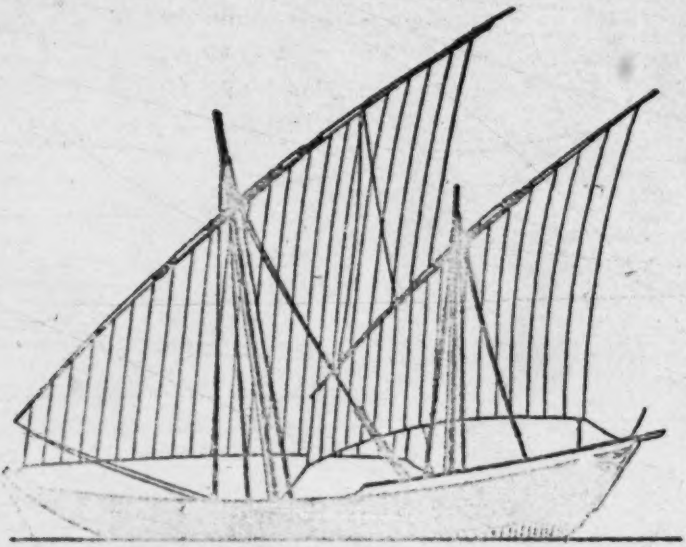
MA 565 554 165

What keeps the seaman a disciplined and more or less contented worker is his hope of reward, principally from smuggling or his own ventures, and his ambition to get hold of a tiny shop in the *suq* of his home town. This is an ambition he rarely achieves. His more usual fate is to die young, especially if he be also a pearl diver.

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

of Dar es Salaam, loaded her with mangrove poles, and brought her back to Zanzibar again, where the *nakhoda* had ostensibly been trying to assemble passengers and extra cargo for the return to Arabia but in fact had been enjoying a new harem.

Mates are paid by shares, and are, in my opinion, an oppressed class. They carry their own ventures, engage in smuggling on a



Baggala

small scale — haberdashery, currency, and so forth — and generally keep the ship's books. They may become *nakhodas* of small *booms*, running to the Basra river; but it is unusual for a man from the more dignified deep-sea trades to descend to this. There is no social status about the *nakhoda* of a coastwise water dhow.

Ships are built by shipwrights who employ no naval architects. Both builders and riggers' lofts are unknown. The ships are put together entirely by eye and take the traditional form either of the double-ended *boom*, or the carved and embellished *baggala*, which obviously has a considerable ancestry from the Portuguese galleon.

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MI1

NA 396 501

galleon. *Baggalas*, being both costly to build and unwieldy in a seaway, are now unfashionable. A *boom* is both cheaper and much easier to build, and carries just as much. Her sharp stern makes her safer in a seaway, though it is no part of her builder's plan that her *nakhodas* will try her qualities in a storm. Their sailing, he hopes, will be confined to sunny seas and more or less favorable winds; therefore the clumsy lateen rig will do.

K MA 501 505

The lateen is awkward but cheap; it demands a big crew, but these are cheap, too, for they are the sailmakers and riggers as well as mariners, and their only cost is an agreed share in the ship's earnings. The lateen is a grand pulling sail, and the dhows sail handsomely in their own conditions. There is nothing clumsy about them, though their fish-oiled hulls smell abominably and their underwater bodies are preserved by a mixture of tallow and lime, rubbed on by hand and renewed quarterly. The sailors do this work, as well as handle all the cargoes, keep the passengers in order and extol the merits of their ship so that more passengers might sail with her, tow the ship with her own longboat and propel the smaller dhows by sweeps, in calms, and fight for her if need be. The Kuwait dhows today are never armed, though the Suri may be.

K MA [566]

III

K MA 505 501 439

A brief description of my personal experiences will serve to illustrate a typical East African voyage.[1] I sailed in a Kuwait dhow of the *boom* type, a vessel of 2,000 date-packages capacity — perhaps 150 tons — which had a crew of twenty-eight. She carried something between 120 and 180 passengers, although her hold was full of salt and rice, and her decks were already crowded with a large longboat, a small gig, and a dhow under construction for sale at Lamu.

K MA 439 505

I joined the vessel at Ma'alla, the native port of Aden. She had already been several months at sea, peddling a full cargo of dates from Fao (by the mouth of the Basra river) around the coast of the Hadhramaut, and to Berbera. When I joined her, she had been hauled out on the beach at Ma'alla and her bottom

K MA 113

[1] The voyage here summarized is described in detail in the author's *Sons of Sinbad* (New York, 1940).

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MI1

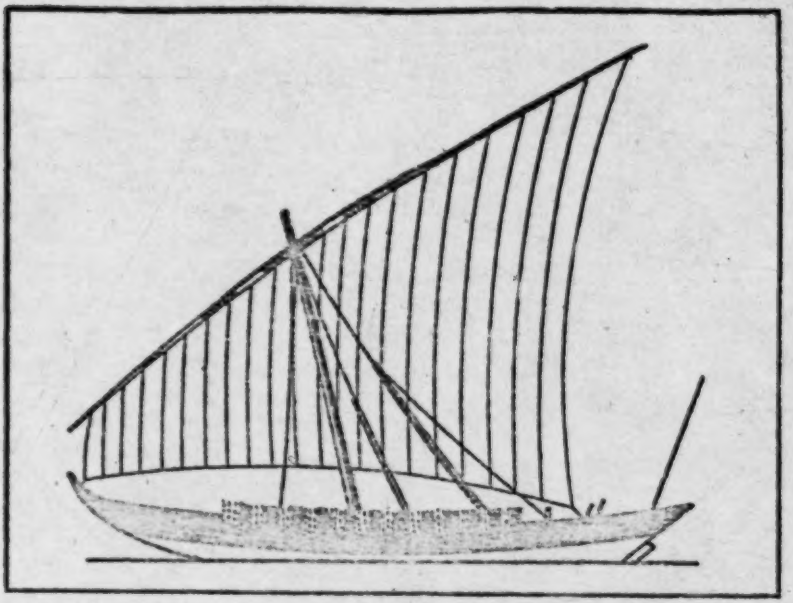
repayed, and already was loaded with her cargo of salt and rice in sacks, and some mysterious parcels on deck for the Sultan of Mukalla. All her crew had their sea chests filled with trade goods from the cheap *suq* in the Crater at Aden; her carpenter was at work on a 40-foot dhow for sale on the voyage; and she had shipped several Suri and Omani merchants, from Aden, bound on a general trading voyage on their own account, wherever the dhow might take them.

We sailed first to Mukalla and Shihr, where we embarked passengers (the fare was eight rupees regardless of destination, the passengers providing their own food and looking after themselves entirely) and some further cargo. This consisted mainly of a parcel of condemned dates which it was hoped to sell to the Somali (or failing that, to feed to the Swahili labor in the Rufiji Delta, when loading mangrove poles), some dried shark which smelled high even aboard the dhow, some cooking stones, and a considerable quantity of basketware.

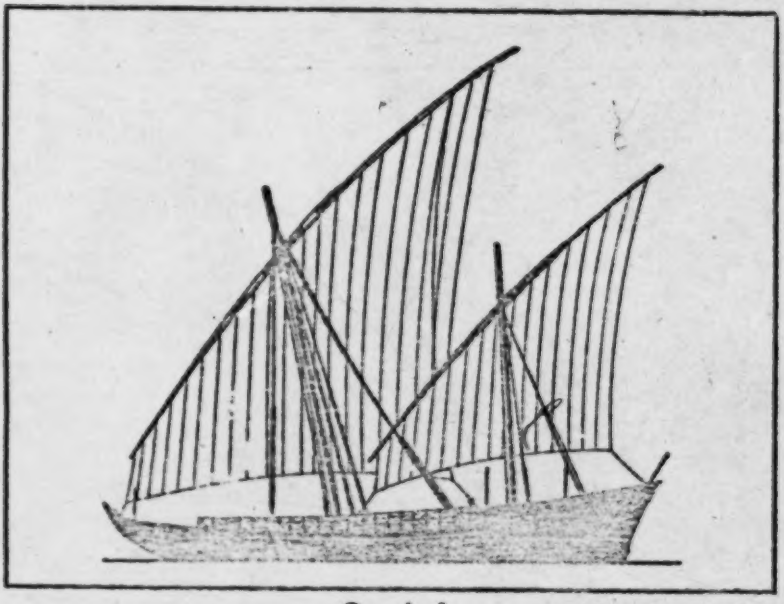
With this lot aboard, and the *nakhoda* pessimistic and depressed at the small number of passengers, though his dhow appeared crowded, we sailed first to Haifun, a salt port on the northeastern coast of Italian Somaliland. There we anchored among a fleet of dhows, and did nothing at all for some time. Finally, some rice was sold, some haberdashery smuggled into boats which the local Somali brought alongside, and lot of fish caught and dried. Then we went on to Mogadishu, running down the coast with the northeast monsoon. At Haifun another Kuwait ship was caught smuggling and heavily fined; and all the Kuwaiti in the harbour contributed to pay the fine. At Mogadishu, it was hoped to land a hundred or so passengers, but the Italians would not permit them to disembark. Trade there was extremely difficult, and little could be done. Some of the merchants left, as far as I could gather, to try to collect debts owing to them from previous voyages. Some smuggling went on (I saw a lovely carpet change hands), some of our passengers melted away and their places were taken by others, equally undocumented.

After a week or ten days we passed on down the coast to Lamu. Here more passengers landed and there was a determined attempt to sell the new dhow which the carpenter had completed. She

501



Zaruk



Sambuk

K MA 501 439 435 was a lovely little vessel which could carry some fifteen tons. The price asked was 1,000 East African shillings, or about $240. At that price, there was no buyer; she finally changed hands at 700 shillings. Lamu was a mangrove-pole port, but I gathered the trade was rather too well regulated for our nakhoda's taste, and we bought nothing.

K MA 439 505 Next came Mombasa, a port with a large dhow trade. Some figures I saw in the Report of the General Manager on the Administration of the Railways and Harbours (Kenya and Uganda) showed that the dhow trade was increasing, rather than diminishing. The latest returns I say, for the year ended December 31, 1937, showed that 1,427 dhows had arrived at Mombasa, an increase of ten percent on the previous year. These 1,427 dhows were computed to register -- if they had been registered -- nearly 40,000 tons. Many were Swahili, from Lamu and Zanzibar, but a large proportion was Arab. There was a native harbor set aside for them, and here we sold salt, landing it in our own longboat.

K MA [579] We got rid of our surviving passengers, gave feasts to merchants and officials of the native harbor (these were a great feature of the voyage, and were always accompanied by much monotonous singing and dancing), gathered tidings from brother nakhodas from Kuwait and Sur about trade prospects further south, collected debts, and finally departed toward Zanzibar.

K MA 501 396 439 There were three Indian and one Iranian deep-sea dhows in the port at Mombasa. The Iranian was an enormous vessel of over 400 tons -- the largest dhow I saw anywhere. She was a boom and had been built at Kuwait, but the Kuwaiti sold her because they found such large vessels uneconomic, in bad times, for the mere reason of their two great capacity. They brought too much to sell, when the market was depressed, and they could not wait indenfinitely to dispose of their cargoes because their overhead was too high, despite the fact that everything possible was done to keep down building costs, even to the sending of Kuwaiti shipwrights to the Malabar coast to build big vessels there, rather than carry the timber to Kuwait.

K MA 439 Zanzibar, at that season of the year, was an even busier Arab port than Mombasa. In the first month of the northeast season, over a hundred ocean-going dhows had arrived at Zanzibar, most

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MI1

K MA 451 465 439 505 debts, odd earnings not shared and even odder earnings which were shared, and mysterious complicated procedures, some of which I never did fathom, for the war came, and stopped my investigations.

The son of the merchant family which owned our dhow, however, told me that her gross profit on the nine-month round voyage was 11,000 rupees, not including the proceeds of the crews' and officers' private ventures. But I think he exaggerated, for the total investment in the dhow was little more than that. But at any rate, the dhow's people were well satisfied and they all, K MA [595] save one, went back to sea with her. The *nakhoda* grew fat throughout the summer, and took a new wife, and a new *boom* for his brother at a cost of 10,500 rupees; and I heard no complaints from the merchants.

K MA 505 465 501 439 As far as I was able to discover, half the gross earnings went to the ship; this was the merchant's share. The cost of the food for the round voyage (which was not much, for all hands lived very simply and fishing lines were the most important equipment in what passed for her storeroom) was deducted from the other half, and the remainder was then divided by shares arranged strictly in accordance with the accepted value of each man's rating aboard. The sailor's share on the voyage which I made was reported to be 135 rupees (about $40), whereof 35 rupees had been advanced. This was little enough for such a long voyage, and though they worked hard at all sorts of things and were ready for any kind of business, I doubt whether a sailor's earnings from other sources amounted to more than 20 or 30 rupees, clear.

K MA 465 506 181 I heard of dhows from Kuwait that season which were distributing less than 100 rupees; according to the Kuwaiti, who had no high opinion of them, the Suri rarely paid out more than fifty. To a sailor whose only home was the sand of the *suq* and his bed the cloak around him, whose wants were few and whose paradise was assured, even 50 rupees may be a vast sum of money. There was, at any rate, contentment throughout the Arab shipping industry as I knew it, and the quiet philosophy I learned among the simple seamen was of great help to me in the days of the long-drawn war which was soon to follow.

226
[501]

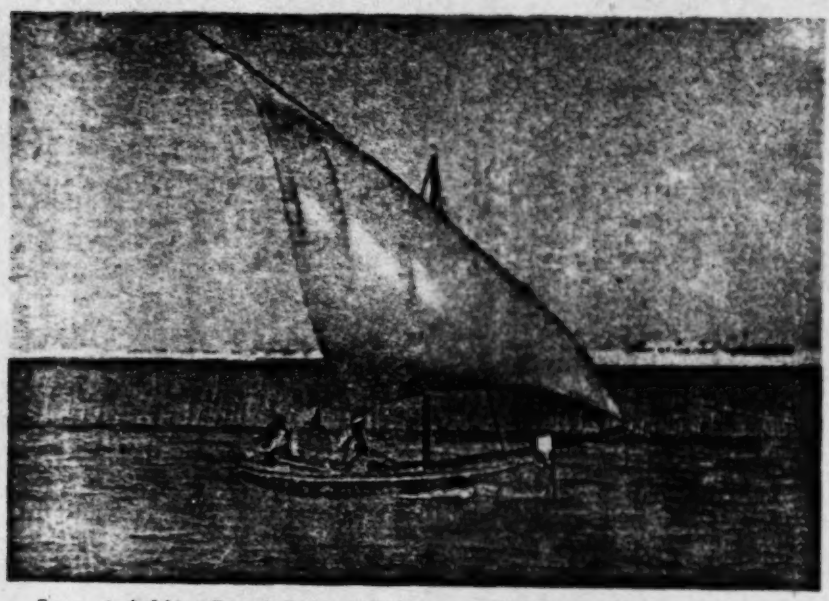


FIG. 3—Arab fishing dhow (*jalbut*) typical of eastern Arabia. The outside wing of a large funnel-type fishweir may be seen directly behind the boat.

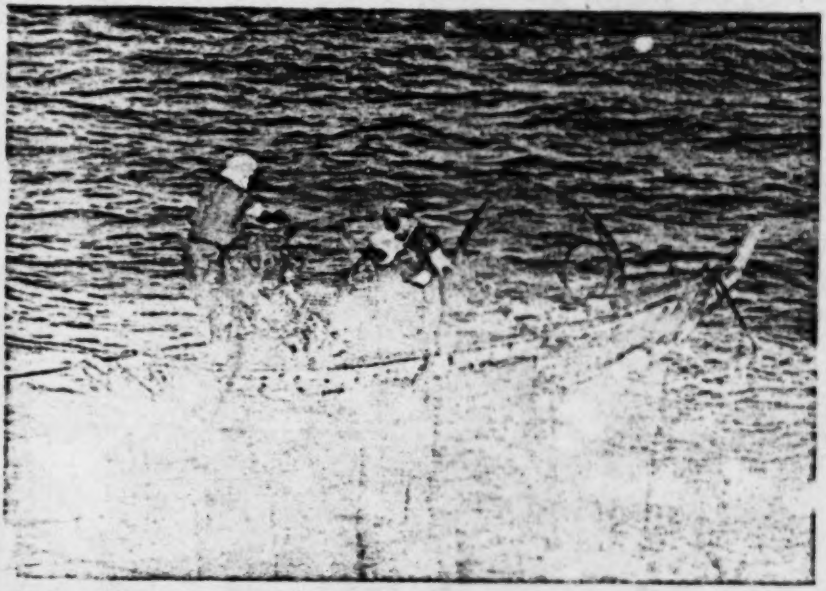


FIG. 4—Fishermen tending their basket fishtraps from a *hallaw* in 30 feet of water. These traps are marked with floats suspended just below low-tide mark.

S: Bowen · C-4 (1945-1947) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

wave action, completely leveled almost all the 10 fishweirs on the Tarut Bay side of the Ras Tanura peninsula. All during the fishing season constant maintenance is necessary (Fig. 13).

Because of its shoal water, Tarut Bay is the only place along the Persian Gulf coast of Arabia where large fishweirs can be built, and one of the best weir locations in Tarut Bay is off the Ras Tanura peninsula. Things went peacefully among the weir tenders and owners until 1945, when the Saudi Arabian refinery project started in high gear. A deepwater oil-loading pier was built on the Gulf side of the end of the peninsula, and a huge pipeway was run from this pier to the refinery, some eight miles away. The pipeway passed close to several of the Tarut Bay fishweirs, and the considerable fill dumped into the bay changed the shore contour slightly

The Arab fishweir owners, ever alert to monetary opportunity, brought suits against the Arabian American Oil Company, asserting that the change in contour had reduced their fish catches and that the company's grading equipment had damaged some of their weirs. After the refinery was partly completed in October, 1945, oil was occasionally spilled into Tarut Bay and provided another complaint for the Arabs, who said that the oil contaminated their weirs. These complaints were such an annoyance to the oil-company executives that they instructed their agents to buy the fishweir rights. By 1947 only three of the original 10 weirs were left; the total price paid was about 72,000 Saudi riyals ($22,000). This money enriched the few Arabs who held the rights to the weirs, but to the Arabs in the Qatif Ras Tanura area the sale was an economic blow, for much of the fish supplied to Hasa Province came from the Ras Tanura traps.

Rock Mining

Another marine occupation is the "mining" of dead coral rock. Two types of coral are mined: *faroush* and *hasa*. Faroush is found on flat bottoms in level layers three to six inches thick. Four-man diving crews, operating from shallow-draft dhows[1] 30 to 45 feet long, pry a huge slab loose with iron bars or by simply lifting its edge. A rope is thrown around the slab, and it is hauled to the dhow, where it is broken up into easily handled pieces (Fig. 14). Diving for faroush can be relatively dangerous: I saw a diver with

[1] For a description of the dhows used in the marine industries of eastern Arabia see R. LeB. Bowen, Jr.: Arab Dhows of Eastern Arabia, *Amer. Neptune*, Vol. 9, 1949, pp. 87–132. The dhows are usually *jalbuts* (see Fig. 3 of the present article), but Bahrein and Kuweit send many *booms* and *sambuks* to the pearl fisheries in addition to the jalbuts. A few small *shoowi* and *battams* are also used by the fishermen (see Fig. 4 of the present article).

3: Bowen C-4 (1945-1947) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

wages, they are given cash advances and food during the winter and during slack periods. They never seem able to pay off their debts to the dhow owners.

Pearling

The most colorful marine industry of the Persian Gulf is pearling.[3] Pearling is definitely a seasonal occupation, confined to the months when

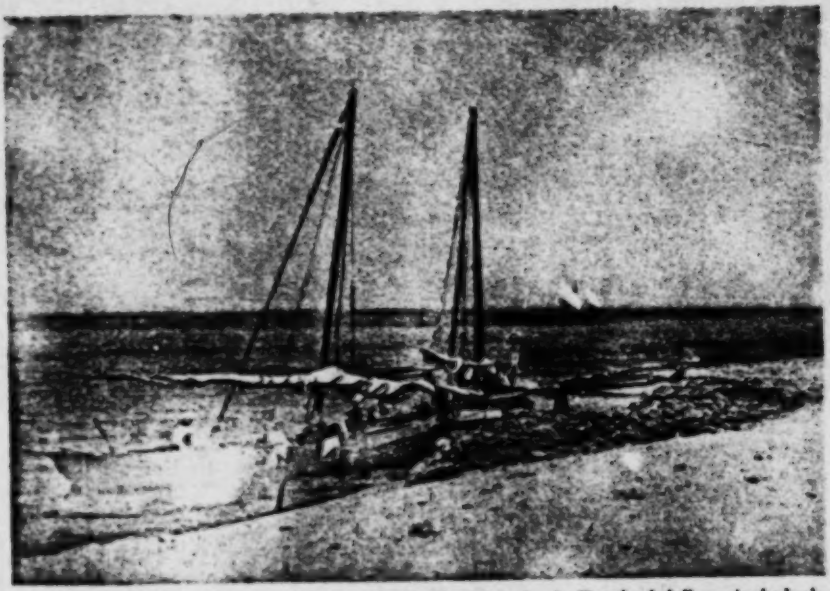


Fig. 15—Unloading bass from jalbuts on the Ras Tanura peninsula. Two loaded dhows in the background are bringing in more.

the water is warm. On the Persian Gulf coast of Arabia the minimum winter air temperature is in the middle forties, the shallow-sea temperature in the low sixties. From long experience the Arabs have found that they can begin deepwater diving in June and continue until the first week in October. At the start and finish of the season the surface-water temperature is about 85°, but the deep-water temperature is considerably less; the maximum surface-water temperature may exceed 100° in August. Before this main season the *ghaus al-kabir* (great diving), there is a season of about two months, known as the *ghaus al-barid* (cold diving), when smaller boats work the shallower waters near their home ports; during the winter many men go out as "waders" at low tide to pick up what they can just below tide level.

[3] See also R. LeB. Bowen, Jr.: The Pearl Fisheries of the Persian Gulf, *Middle East Journ.*, Vol. 5, 1951, pp. 161–180.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

however, if it sighted land, it headed straight for it, showing the sailors the direction of the nearest land. Certainly this would seem to indicate voyages of more daring than mere coasting voyages. There are numerous Sanskrit and Pali references to Indian trading voyages dating from about the third century B.C., and there is one Sanskrit manuscript containing a treatise on shipbuilding in ancient India, giving the sizes (ranging up to 260 feet in length) of dozens of types of ships.[3]

Zanzibar is the unofficial southern port for the lateen fleet sailing down from the north, although the Indians sometimes go on to Madagascar. Soon after the northeast monsoon has set in, lateen craft start to come into Zanzibar. Arabs come from the Persian Gulf ports of Basra, Kuwait, Bahrein, and Sharjah on the Trucial Coast of Oman; Persians send ships from the Persian Gulf ports of Bushire, Lingeh, Qishm, and Bandar Abbas. Arabs of the Oman ports of Sur and Muscat on the Gulf of Oman and Indians from the Gulf of Cutch and the Malabar coast all send dhows down to Africa. Arab craft also sail down from Aden and Mukalla in the Hadhramaut, while the Red Sea contributes its craft from Port Sudan, Massawa, and Hodeida. Even the Somali coast contributes to the fleet arriving at Zanzibar, with dhows coming down from Djibouti, Berbera, and Mogadiscio.

Kuwait is the largest maritime and dhow-building port in the Persian Gulf, with Bahrein a very poor second. While Bahrein cannot begin to compare with Kuwait from a maritime standpoint, it probably ranks ahead of the latter as an emporium in the Persian Gulf. It serves for all the entrepôt trade to the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia, the goods coming into Bahrein in large dhows and being transshipped from Bahrein to Arabia in shallow-draft *jalbhuts* (see Plate 17—top). In 1939 Kuwait had 106 ocean-going *bhums* on the registry.[4] However, the majority of the Kuwait deepwater *bhums* sail to India, rather than to Africa, carrying dates from Basra. The mariners of Kuwait probably reached their present maritime status a little over a century ago. Palgrave traveled in the Persian Gulf in 1862-1863 and was much impressed with the maritime activity of Kuwait:

> Among all the seamen who ply the Persian Gulf, the mariners of [Kuwait] hold the first rank in daring, in skill, and in solid trustworthiness of character. Fifty years since their harbour with its little town . . . was a mere nothing; now it is the most active and the most important port of the northerly Gulf.[5]

[3] R. Mookerji, *Indian Shipping* (Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912), p. 19.

[4] A. Villiers, 'The Arab Dhow Trade,' *Middle East Journal*, II (1948), 399.

[5] W. G. Palgrave, *A Year's Journey Through Central and Eastern Arabia (1862-63)* (3rd ed., London: Macmillan and Co., 1866), II, 386.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

228 361 505

However, a century before this, Kuwait was apparently noted more for its pearl fisheries (which are still important) than for its maritime trade, as Niebuhr related that in 1763

> Kuwait is a sea-port town. . . . The inhabitants live by the fishery of pearls and of fishes. They are said to employ in this species of naval industry more than 800 boats. In the favorable season of the year, this town is left almost desolate, everybody going out either to the fishing, or upon some trading adventure.[6]

In Niebuhr's time, in the eighteenth century, the Omani sailors from Muscat and Sur on the Gulf of Oman were the famed Arab mariners, for Niebuhr related that

> The inhabitants of Oman, although not fond of sea-fights, are nevertheless the best mariners in all Arabia. They have several good harbours, and employ many small vessels in the navigation between Jidda and Basra. To this last town there come annually fifty such vessels.[7]

In the middle of the last century Muscat was still an important maritime port, for in 1854 Osgood related that

> Several ports in the Persian Gulf are tributary to it, and some excellent ships and a large number of [*baghlas*] employed in coasting and foreign trade, are owned by the Banian merchants at Muscat. In fact more than half of the trade of the Persian Gulf is carried on in ships owned at Muscat. . . . The trade with America, which is carried on chiefly by vessels from Salem does not exceed thirty-five or forty thousand dollars annually. Dates and cash are usually taken in exchange for American merchandize.[8]

[439]

In the present day Muscat has completely fallen from its former prized position and given way to Kuwait and Bahrein Island in the Persian Gulf. However, the port of Sur in Oman still carries on the maritime tradition of the Omanis and maintains a considerable fleet of dhows which have long been prominent in the trading along the African coast.

501

The craft that make the trip down the African coast from Arabia are by no means all large ocean-going vessels; craft of all sizes and descriptions come into Zanzibar. Villiers[9] tells of seeing a 30-foot *jalbhut* from Oman sailing down the African coast. Having owned and sailed a *jalbhut* of about the same size in the relatively calm Persian Gulf waters, I have nothing but the utmost respect for anyone with the nerve to sail such a small open boat several thousand miles in the potentially rougher Indian Ocean.

113

[6] C. Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia* (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son, 1792), II, 127.
[7] Ibid., 122.
[8] Osgood, *Notes of Travel* (Salem, 1854), p. 81.
[9] A. Villiers, 53, p. 190.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

cargo of fish if the local supply is not sufficient, and fish their way down the Arabian and African coast, selling fish wherever they can. Then they do the same thing on the way back. Mukalla is a favorite stopping place on the way down to Africa; I have seen dozens of *bedans* from Sur come into Mukalla and lay out their catch of shark or tuna on the beach to dry while they beached their dhows and put a coat of shark liver oil on their hulls (see Plate 18—top and bottom). Shark is a favorite Arab food; the flesh is cut off in strips or slabs and dried, while the liver is saved for its oil. The Arabs have little use for the tails or fins of the shark, but they are all meticulously saved and eventually find their way to China via India.

Thus these fish-bearing dhows from Oman start their trading venture from their home port, carrying a product of the port, and never carry other cargo; they trade fish from Sur to Zanzibar and back. For this trade they apparently always use the primitive *bedan*, usually ranging from fifty to sixty feet in length. The Suris export dates from Oman, or go to Basra for a cargo; when carrying dates they use large *sambuks* and *baghlas*.

In contrast to Arab and Persian ships which sail along the coasts the whole way, whether going to India or Africa, Indian vessels usually sail straight from India across the ocean for South Arabia or Africa with consignments of goods from Indian exporters at specific ports. Only rarely do they carry dates; their usual cargo consists of the products of India. From the Malabar coast they may carry coir rope stuffs, coir matting, teakwood, teak dugout canoes, coconuts, spices, cement, bricks, or tiles, while from Bombay they may pick up cotton piecegoods, groundnut oil, or tea. Most of the Indian ships that voyage to Arabia or Africa come from the Gulf of Cutch; few if any craft from Bombay or the Malabar coast carry this trade today.

In vivid contrast to the Arab date cargo and Indian cargo, which is usually on consignment, the replacement cargo for the rest of the voyage for the average Arab dhow is purchased by the *nakhoda* from the profit made on the date freight, for sale at the best market. After its date cargo has been discharged, the dhow becomes a trader in every connotation of the word, picking up and selling cargoes as she coasts south along the South Arabian and East African coast.

Sometimes the *nakhoda* may pick up a small cargo of partially spoiled dates to unload on the Africans; these the crew may wrap meticulously in fancy wrappers. At Aden the dhow may take on salt, sugar (from Java), rice (from Rangoon), canned goods, hardware, kerosene, or cotton goods and prints, and from the Hadhramaut coast the cargo may be dried shark

ported annually from East Africa to the Persian Gulf and Arabia.[24] The term 'human cargo' is no exaggeration, for slaves were packed in the holds of dhows with an eye only towards maximum capacity. There is an old sketch of a small dhow loaded with 156 slaves (men, women, and children) packed into the hold, on the bottom and on two bamboo decks above with only three feet clearance between decks (see Figure 3).[25]

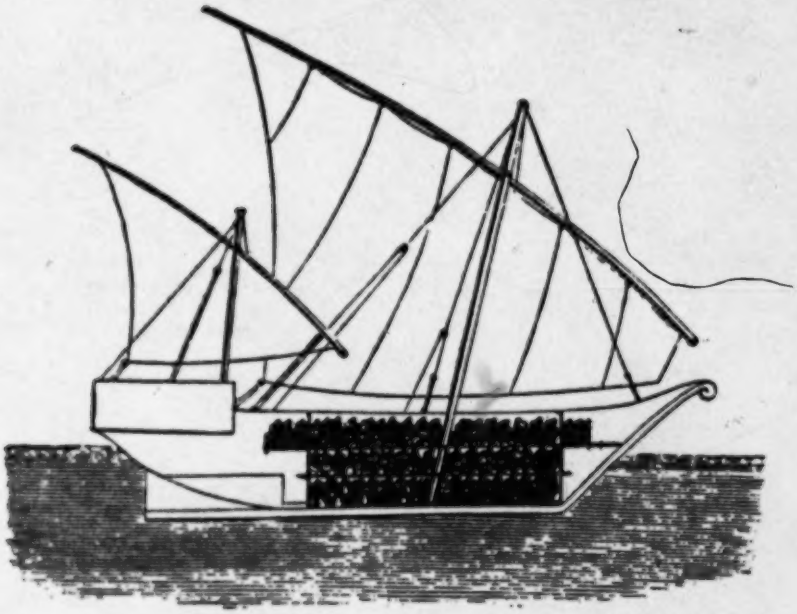


Fig. 3. Slaves packed into the hold of a small dhow, on the bottom and on two bamboo decks, with only three feet of clearance

Today slave-running carries such high penalties that no Arab would attempt it with a hold full of slaves on a long voyage to the Persian Gulf. However, the slave trade still operates on a reduced scale in the Red Sea between Africa and Arabia, usually utilizing fast *zarooks* and carrying only a small number of slaves. The trade is still active, mainly because both slavery and white slavery still flourish in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. These two countries signed neither of the two world conventions: the one in 1921 forbidding traffic in women and children and the one in 1933

[24] Anonymous, 'Vessels Used in the Zanzibar Slave Trade,' *The Illustrated London News*, LXII (March, 1873), 208-209.

[25] Ibid.

whenever they are near reefs. An exception to this is the slave-runner dashing from Africa to Arabia, for his activities are best carried on under cover of darkness. The reefs in the Red Sea are the main reason why foreign dhows do not venture very far into its waters.

In the field of navigation the Arabs are little impressed with Vasco da Gama's voyage, so famous in the West.[34] The Arabs take all the credit themselves; they claim that da Gama forced an Arab pilot to show him the way to India. Arab legend relates that an Ibn Majid, a famous pilot from the Persian Gulf, was delivered to da Gama by the Sheikh of Malindi (in present-day Kenya) as a hostage for stopping the siege of the town; the Arabs immortalize this Persian Gulf pilot and associate da Gama only with European intrusion into their territories.

The Arab dhow is actually not a very seaworthy craft (see Plate 19—top). It manages very successfully in fair weather, but in any kind of rough weather the dhow is likely to get into trouble fast. The *baghla* is apparently considerably less seaworthy than the *bhum*, as even Arab passengers (who are not particularly well informed about anything) prefer to travel in *bhums*.[35] Apparently the great transom stern of the *baghla* tends to make the craft unmanageable in heavy seas.

In the African port of Mombasa a Casualty Book listing all dhow casualties in the vicinity of the port shows that, while there were frequent accidents with small craft and less with larger craft, there was little loss of life.[36] This stems from the Arab's method of coasting close enough to land so that he can row ashore. However, no records list the number of dhows that have gone down with complete loss of life.

If the dhow springs a leak, it may often be disastrous. On a heavily-laden dhow the crew cannot get at the leak to repair it, and not having any pumps they do not even have time to start bailing. If they can get at it, the Arabs have been known to stop a leak where a plank was stove in by filling a cloth with rice, tying a string around the gathered neck and stuffing it in the hole; when the rice expands it fills the hole tightly.

Villiers[37] relates that a 178-ton Indian dhow loaded with mats sprang a leak and sank off Africa because the cargo prevented anyone from getting at the leak. The crew took fifteen minutes to clear the dhow, and very soon afterwards the sea was over her decks. The early English traveler Palgrave[38] had the same thing happen to him in 1863—an event which

[34] A. Villiers, *SS*, p. 197.
[35] Ibid., p. 106.
[36] Ibid., pp. 191-194.
[37] Ibid., p. 193.
[38] W. G. Palgrave, *Central and Eastern Arabia* (3rd ed., London: Macmillan and Co., 1866), II, 342 ff.

nearly put an end to his traveling. While sailing in a *baghla* Palgrave was caught in a hurricane just off Muscat; the dhow lay to and drifted. As the storm set in with violence the dhow sprang a leak and in a matter of minutes settled into the sea. After a night in a small boat, Palgrave and eight others (ten men were lost) reached a beach in Oman. Ten other dhows, part Persian and part Omani, also went down off Muscat in this storm with complete loss of life on three of the craft.

A heavily-laden dhow hull-down in the water is extremely vulnerable to rain storms and squalls, even if she does not spring a leak. If such a dhow is caught in a deluge of rain, it may go down very quickly, for without any pumps there is hardly time even to start to hand-bail from the small well. The smaller open-waisted boats and the decked ocean sailers catch all rain, and if enough rain comes down fast enough, the craft simply goes down. Villiers[39] relates how a huge new 500-ton *bhum* sailed out of India on its maiden voyage with a cargo of coir. Caught in a rain squall the first night, the dhow filled with water and scuttled. However, in this instance, the rain apparently swelled the coir, which in turn split the hull. Most dhows lash palm mats amidship to extend the gunwales, whether they are open-waisted or decked; however, this is not very effective in rough weather.

In heavy winds it is customary for the dhow to split a seam or two in its great driving mainsail. However, the sailors will tell you that weak seams have their virtues and act as a safety device to protect both the sail-cloth and the mast from serious damage in sudden blows. In very rough weather the dhow sailor douses his sail and simply allows the craft to drift, without using any steadying sails or sea anchors. Usually they are caught in water too deep for their anchor lines and feel that drifting is the safest way.

The dhow is never prepared for any emergency at sea—it copes with it as best it can when the occasion arises. The dhow never carries any life preservers, life jackets, flares, or any other safety devices. The exception to this is the many Indian deepwatermen which sport life preservers on the stern. If a man falls overboard, Arabs head the dhow up and pull him aboard after he swims to the dhow; if the currents are too strong, they lower the longboat. However, the longboat is never ready to be lowered, as there are usually no davits on a dhow, the longboat being carried on deck; thus to lower it takes considerable time. Nothing is ever secured on board a dhow, on deck or below, and in rough weather the Arab waits until something goes scudding across the deck before he fastens it down;

[39] A. Villiers, *SS*, p. 365.

• 501 sometimes it is too late, for it may have already gone overboard. The Arab usually has no lines ready when he comes into a mooring and he may just as often throw a loose anchor over as not.

501 Dhows never show lights of any kind at night, whether under way or
502 anchored. Although British regulations have forced many dhows from various ports on the Indian Ocean to carry lights, there is unfortunately no way of forcing the Arabs to use them. This undoubtedly results from centuries of travel in pirate-infested waters, where a light at night served only as a signal for sudden attack from pirates. There is only a weak light in the binnacle with which to see the course; everything else is dark. Not even when in the sea lanes off South Arabia, in the Persian Gulf, or in the Red Sea, where freighters and tankers beat a constant path, does the dhow show a light. In case of collision at night, the boat that can prove that it showed lights has a legal edge.

At the West Pier at Ras Tanura on the Persian Gulf, there is often considerable movement of Arab dhows and Arab *lanchs* (kerosene-driven native launches). Dhows slip in and out of their mooring like shadows on nights so black that a dirty white sail could not be seen ten feet away. One night a *lanch*, all of which carry lights, hit a rock-laden dhow amidship and in a matter of seconds sent her to the bottom in forty feet of water. Native divers unloaded her, and she was eventually salvaged. Since then, dhows make a frantic attempt to fan their coffee fires up to a bright glow when they see any *lanch* lights approaching, but they still do not carry standard lights. It is an eerie sight to see the glow of a charcoal fire suddenly light up a large lateen sail directly in your path!

501 When sailing along their own coasts, the Arabs like to sail in two's and
502 three's. This arises from the fact that piracy is by no means a thing of the
721 past. For centuries piracy and robbery were honorable professions among many tribes along the long Arabian littoral; such a reputation did the piratical Omani have during the last half of the last century that the very sight of their characteristic *bedans* and *batils* brought actual fear to the population of Zanzibar.[50] Niebuhr noted dangerous conditions in the Red Sea two centuries ago:

> Although from pirates properly so called, there is little to be feared in the Arabic gulfh [Red Sea], yet, so unskilled are the mariners in these latitudes, that they dare not venture to any distance from the coasts. This timorous mode of sailing might expose a single vessel to the robbery of the Arabs; to avoid which, these ships sail in little fleets; four always setting out together, that they may join to defend themselves.[51]

113

[50] G. L. Sulivan, *Dhow Chasing* (London, 1873), p. 102.
[51] C. Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia* (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son, 1792), I, 212.

533 tacked almost savagely as the men chant praises to Allah and stamp the
535 deck as they shuffle by for another chance at the halliard. When the yard,
502 with the sail gathered in stops, is halfway up, the sailors may stop working and go into a dance, snapping their fingers and stamping the deck. On a large ocean-going dhow of 150 tons, it takes a whole hour to masthead the yard—about one-third of which is spent in dancing and singing. On a smaller dhow there is much less organization in raising the sail, but it is usually done faster with less song and dance.

502 Once the sail is raised and the dhow is under way, the sailors' duties are usually completed for a considerable length of time. However, if the weather changes, the sail may have to be changed. Once under way it may take several hours on a large dhow to lower one sail and replace it with a smaller (or larger) sail. The course may also have to be changed at times, regardless of weather changes. The Arab dhow tacks by wearing while sailing downwind; in wearing all hands have appointed stations, where stays, tacks, and sheets must be shifted.[49]

501 There is one more important duty carried out semiannually on the great ocean-going dhows running to and from Africa and India: that is cleaning the bottom. The bottom is usually cleaned and refinished before the dhow makes its return trip (from Africa or India) and after it has finished its seasonal trip. The dhow is moved into a shelving beach at high tide, and the ship is lightened as much as possible by the removal of any cargo and its yards, which are lowered overboard. The mainmast is lowered in its gear to the aft of the V-shaped trough in which it rests. Sometimes, depending on the dhow, it is necessary to completely unship the mast; at other times it is sufficient simply to lower it so that its resistance to the wind (and thus its toppling effect) is at a minimum. It should be remembered that the mast on a medium-sized ocean-going dhow is a massive teakwood spar weighing around five tons, while on a large dhow it may run well over ten tons.

When the dhow is lightened sufficiently, it is kedged into shallow water to the songs and chants of the crew laboring on the anchor lines. With the falling tide, mangrove pole props are lashed along the gunwales on each side so that as the tide leaves the vessel dry, it is propped up on stilts. With each successive tide change, the stilts must be carefully reset, as the vessel is partially refloated. To allow a large dhow to topple over is a serious matter, as it may have to lie there until a spring tide lifts it.

When the tide has receded sufficiently, the sailors set to work remov-

[49] For a description of 'wearing' see R. LeB. Bowen, Jr., 'Arab Dhows of Eastern Arabia,' AMERICAN NEPTUNE, IX (1949), 122-129.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

ing the old paying-stuff with scrapers. After this is removed they immediately start to put on the new compound, a mixture of tallow and lime, in thick layers with the flat of their hands. As soon as the task is finished, the dhow is kedged into deeper water, re-rigged, and is ready to sail. If no planks have to be replaced, this operation should not consume more than two or three days. A unique though rather incredible means of cleaning the bottom of an Arab dhow is recorded by Villiers,[10] who relates that, while becalmed off Oman, the sailors on the *bhum* on which he was sailing dived overboard, and scraped the sea growth off the ship's bottom while swimming slowly from side to side! The *bhum* in this instance was drawing thirteen feet of water.

All work on a large dhow is done by brute strength, and when the crew is working, the pace is very strenuous. All hands carry out orders day and night with the same fanatic vigor—it almost seems as though their lives depended upon the particular task they were doing at the moment. The *nakhoda* plays no favorites; when the tempo becomes too fast, those too old or feeble will drop out or be given a sea burial in a cover of palm fronds. Thus it is easy to understand why, when there is no work, all hands are to be found asleep. Thus have the dhows sailed for centuries on their unhurried voyages, and so they will probably continue for centuries. Of all the crews—Arab, Persian, and Indian—the Arabs from Kuwait attack their work with the most energy, almost fanatically.

At times the large deepwater dhows still have a pomp and ceremony about them that give them a dash of color never to be found in coastal dhows. Whenever coming into a large port that can supply the Arab sailor with the diverse entertainment that sailors of all lands expect after a long voyage, there is a great celebration. This consists of the dance so familiar among male Arabs throughout the Arab world—dull shuffling, agitating, jumping and hopping, accompanied by the loud noise of snapping fingers and moaning music from drums and tambourines. Sometimes the sailors get so wrapped-up in their dancing while entering a port that they are late in executing orders. Quite naturally, the longer a dhow has been at sea and the farther it is from its home port, the greater the celebration.

V

On even the largest Arab deepwatermen, the crew has no quarters, as there is no 'below'; all hands live on deck, finding the softest place they can. Usually the sailor's clothes—a nightshirt-like gown or a sarong and

[10] A. Villiers, *SS*, p. 298.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

501 a headdress—serve as his bedding. The Arab has not been spoiled by soft mattresses and can get a good night's rest on a floor, deck, or hard ground. The *nakhoda*, the mate, and a few selected passengers live on the poop. Sometimes an awning is spread over the poop to keep the burning sun out, and other times it is bare; sometimes a Persian rug is spread on the poop. There is invariably a cabin beneath the poop for the storage of valuable cargo and ship's stores (see Plate 22—top). This cabin is usually only the space between the continuation of the main deck and the poop deck. Sometimes there are doors leading forward, but more often it is simply open.

As there is no below on a dhow, there are quite naturally no toilets below. Dhows do carry toilets, however, in the form of one-holed privies, hung overboard off the poop (see Plate 21—bottom). They are usually on the port side, but are sometimes seen on the starboard; I once saw a large *sambuk* in Aden with two, one to port and one to starboard. These lack the privacy of a privy, and are almost completely open. Freya Stark[21] had to have the captain rig up a special awning for her when she traveled down the South Arabian coast in a dhow.

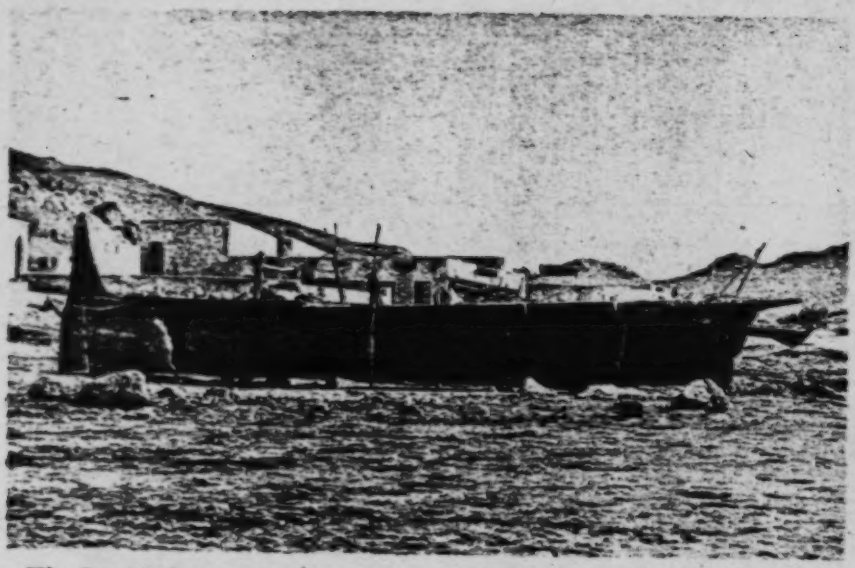
When the dhows carry passengers they are packed on the main deck like cattle. Living conditions are not too bad without passengers, but with a load of passengers, conditions immediately become foul. Ordinarily the bilge on a dhow is beyond description, but sanitary conditions become unimaginable with a load of passengers who are so packed in that they cannot all hang over the rail in rough weather. Villiers[22] tells of seeing a small 60-foot *bhum* from Oman sailing down the coast of Africa with about two hundred Omani passengers; it was estimated by the Arabs on Villiers' ship that ten of these would die before reaching Zanzibar. Whenever there is a death aboard, the Arabs conduct a hasty sea burial; deaths are never reported to port authorities by the Arabs, for fear of not being cleared.

805 Although the Arab aboard ship has little concept of time as far as days go, he divides the day into four periods separated by the announcement 788 of the five daily prayers in which all good Moslems religiously indulge. Prayer time is announced by the *muezzin* (prayer caller), who may be any one of the crew or officers. The *muezzin* simply announces the time of prayer, and bears no similarity to a priest or minister, for the Moslems have none of these; their religion is voluntary. The first sound to fall on Arab ears every day is the raucous call of the *muezzin* perched on some

[21] F. Stark, *A Winter in Arabia* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1940), p. 314.
[22] A. Villiers, 55, p. 124.

PLATE 18

501



The Omani who coast down to Africa and fish along the way haul their *bedans* out periodically, lay the fish out to dry, and oil the hulls; this one is at Mukalla

251

Tuna fish drying in the sun at Mukalla. The Omani carry large quantities of dried fish down the South Arabian and East African coasts, coasting down on one monsoon and back on the other

[FACING P. 190B]

White radishes	100	5
Lemons	40	5
Other fresh vegetables	400	15
10 live sheep	1100	40
15 live sheep and goats	1500	80
	Total Rs.	1502

It should be noted that rice constitutes one-third of the cost. The other great staple at sea—fish—is not listed accurately, as most of it is caught fresh; probably between two thousand and three thousand pounds of fresh fish was eaten. It should also be noted that no charge occurs for water. The dhow will take a tank of bad water rather than pay for it.

The Arab dhow, regardless of its size, always has a fish-line overboard, and it is not uncommon to see half a dozen lines overboard. I have caught many fish myself trailing a line from a dhow in the Persian Gulf. Villiers[88] states that fishing off the whole African coast is particularly good and that it is not uncommon for the many lines trailed from a Kuwait *bhum* to net twenty to thirty large fish a day. The fish not eaten are cleaned by splitting, are pounded in salt, and then hung in the sun to dry; the sailors never bother to scale the fish.

The galley on an Arab dhow is simply a spot on the deck. The stove consists simply of an open-sided box with some sand and cooking stones on the bottom (see Plate 21—top left). The larger the dhow the larger the fire-box. The cook cooks everything here with wood fires of palm wood, brush, or driftwood.

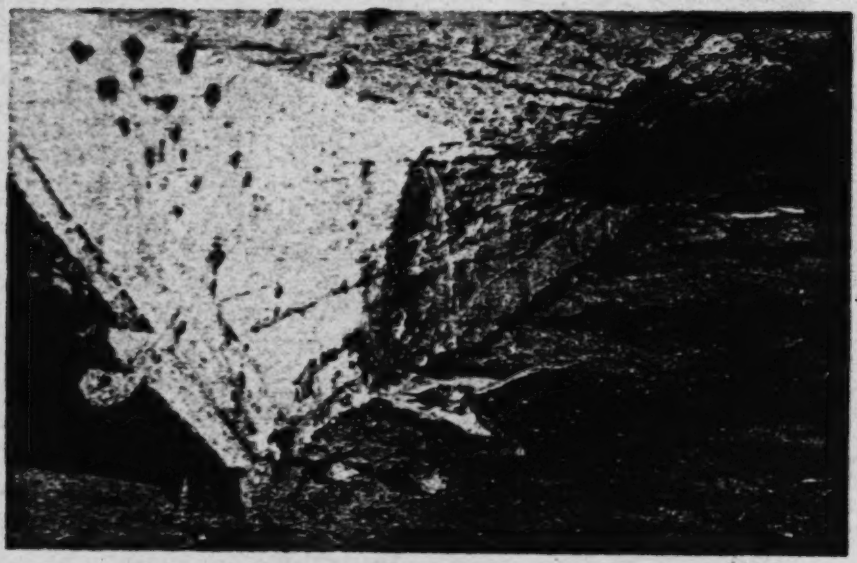
On dhows of South Arabia and the Gulf of Aden ports there is also a bread oven. I have never seen these on dhows from the Persian Gulf or Gulf of Oman. The oven consists of a wide-mouthed pot perhaps fifteen or eighteen inches in diameter; this pot is put inside a barrel about two and one-half or three feet in diameter and the space around the pot is filled with sand (see Plate 21—top right). The barrel is firmly lashed together and then is usually securely lashed to the deck. To bake bread, the cook builds a fire in the bottom of the pot and allows it to burn down to the coals. Then he takes a flat piece of dough like a large pancake and pastes this on the inside of the pot; the heat in the walls of the pot and the coals bake the bread. This is the Arab *khubuz*, one of the staples of the Arab at sea as well as on land.

VI

It is difficult for one totally unfamiliar with the Arab East to understand the economic system of the Arabs. The tenets of Islam prevent any

[88] A. Villiers, 55, p. 130.

501



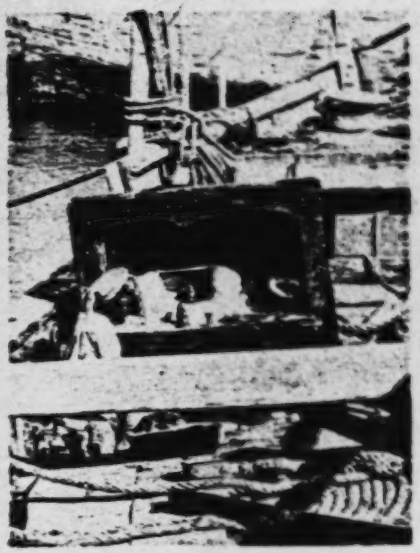
The dhow is usually not a very seaworthy craft. The photograph shows bilge water leaking through weak seams in the bottom of a large dhow drawn up on the beach

505

The crew usually does all the stevedoring. The photograph shows the crew of an Aden dhow loading the undecked craft for a trip to Djibouti. The cargo remains unprotected from the weather

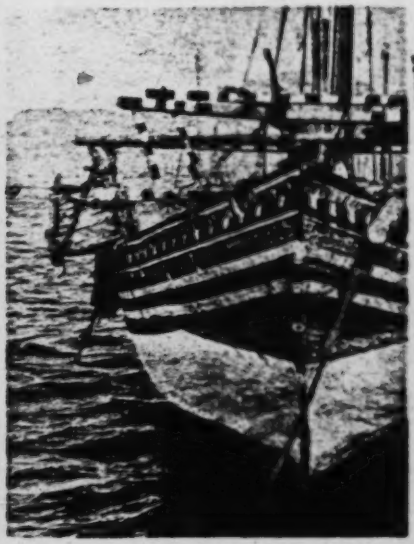
Facing P. 196(A)

5010



The galley on a dhow is on deck; the stove is an open-sided box

An oven on a dhow (to the right of the water drum), made of a wide mouth pot put inside a barrel of sand



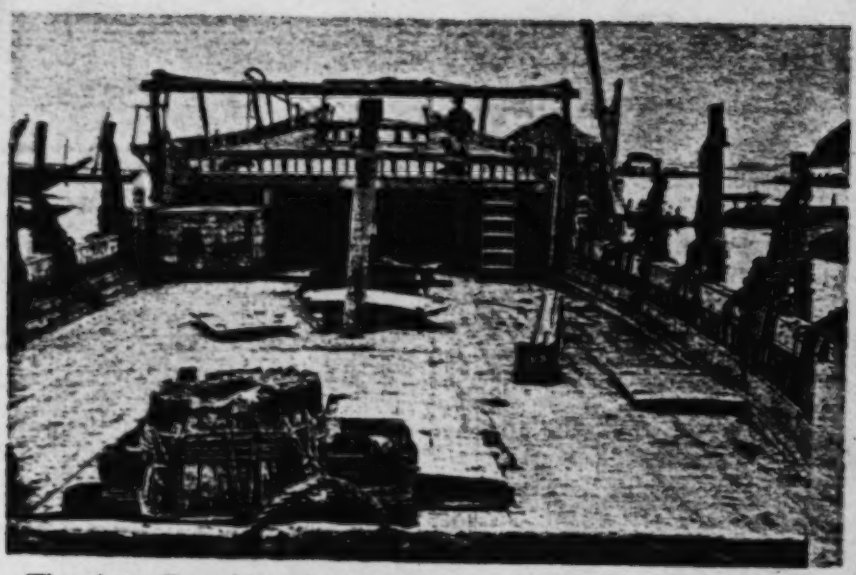
The toilet on a dhow is simply an open privy hung overboard

The toilet on a large dhow as seen from below

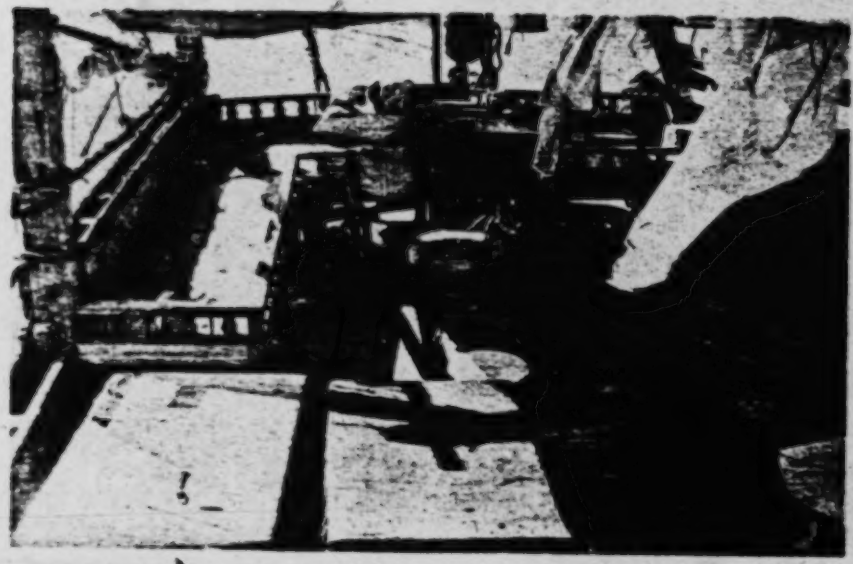
Facing P. 196(C)

PLATE 22

501



There is usually a cabin under the poop, formed by the space between the poop deck and the extension of the main deck. Note the man on the poop for an estimate of size

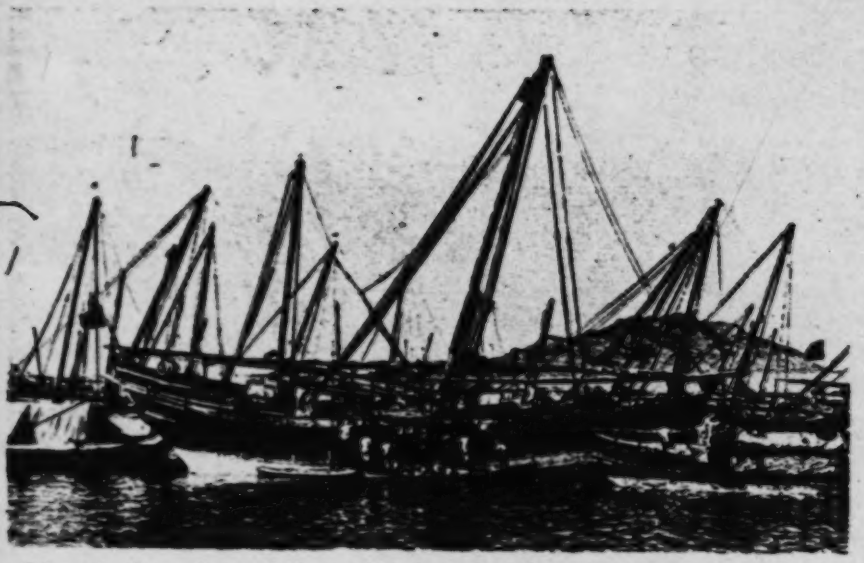


The poop is usually cluttered up with sailors' chests, filled with cheap goods for trade. Note the binnacle, the only navigation instrument on the dhow, a large *baghla*

[Facing P. 197]

4; Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

501



Dhows in the native anchorage at Maala in Aden. The large *baghla* in the foreground is discharging its date cargo with its longboat, the crew acting as stevedores

Dhows in the harbor at Mukalla at dusk. A *bedan* from Oman (with its sail up) is just slipping out of the harbor on its way down to Africa

Facing p. 202

5: Harrison D-4 (1912-1924) 1924 M1 Middle East
Maritime Arabs M1.2
Kuwait M1.1

M 438 361 K 161 228 439 312 262 All the cities along this coast north of Ras el Kheima are diving communities, and some of them are quite large. Kuwait, the largest, has about fifty thousand inhabitants. Kuwait has good harbor facilities, and the government of the city has been notably efficient and strong-handed for many years. A pearl diver may as well live in one coast town as another, and so Kuwait has grown to be a large city. The drinking water for this entire city is brought in specially constructed sailing vessels from the mouth of the Arab River in Mesopotamia sixty miles away. The divers live on rice that is brought them from India, on wheat that comes from Persia, and on sheep from inland Persia and Arabia. The only local product is fish. The physical surroundings of all these towns are very similar to those of Kuwait. The landscape is an unbroken and monotonous expanse of sand on one side and sea on the other. The heat in summer is extreme and the air is practically always moist, so that for three or four months in the summer the climate is almost unbearable.

[K 132]

M 228 463 In the spring the diving community begins to hum with activity. The boats are cleaned up and repaired. New masts are put in and new rigging provided. As the time for diving approaches, supplies of food and water are taken on board. The divers collect from far and near. Most of the population are divers, and in addition many more come from a distance to dive for the season. There are men from every district in Arabia and from all over Mesopotamia; a few come even from the various provinces of Persia. The place is filled with festivities and good fellowship and hopes for a successful season.

M 228 301 The day for embarkation finally comes. The boats are fitted with enormous sails, and also with a full com-

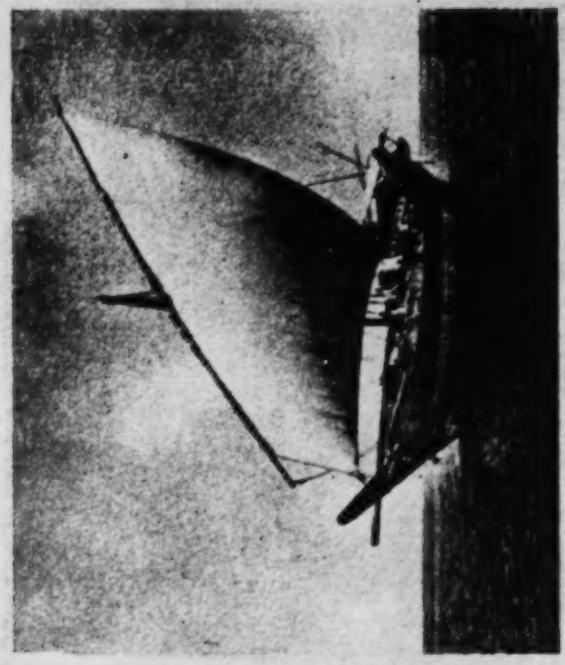
5: Harrison D-4 (1912-1924) 1924 M1 Middle East
Maritime Arabs M1 K2

plement of long heavy oars, so that they can be independent of the wind when necessary. One of these great diving boats moving out to sea is a sight long to be remembered. I once watched one of the largest Dibai boats leave for the pearl banks. During the winter these boats are hauled up on the sand within a lagoon that runs through the city. The great boat moved majestically down this lagoon and out to sea. There were fifteen to twenty enormous oars on each side and each oar was manned by two divers. The oarsmen swung down the lagoon with a stateliness that I have never seen surpassed, the men chanting as they worked, *"A billah mal, a billah mal,"* in a rhythm that had all the swing of a regiment off to war or a football team on its way to a game. There was a splendid silk flag flying at the stern, and the great ship went out to sea with every small boy in Dibai wishing he was on board. I felt the thrill of it myself, and the Baluch boy that I had with me as a medical assistant had hard work to keep both his feet on the ground. "Oh *Sahib,*" he said, "it makes me want to go with them."

However, once the pearl banks are reached, the work is hard and dangerous. The long oars are fastened in place so that they stretch out horizontally over the water and to each oar a rope is tied which carries a lead weight or a stone on its end. The diver stands on this weight as he descends, in order to get down quickly. Each diver has an assistant whose duty it is to haul up the weight as soon as the diver reaches the bottom, so that it may be ready for the next descent. There is a second rope which is fastened around the diver's waist. By this his assistant pulls him up when he gives the signal. This assistance is not necessary if the diving is in shallow

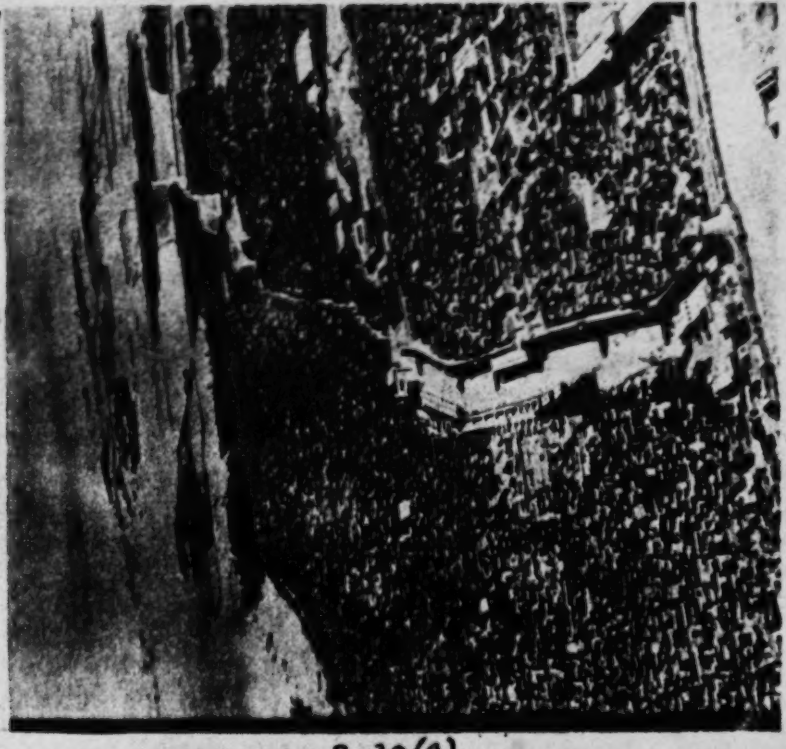
4:Lebkicher et al U-3 (no date)1952 MJl Saudi Arabia MJl
Maritime Arabs MK2

MA
501



Typical trading dhow on the Persian Gulf.

SA
361



Aerial view of Hofuf, the capital city of Al Hasa province.

[For information on boats and boat equipment and on the pearling industry, see MI1 Kuwait, 1; Dickson, Category 116, pp. 473 to 496.]